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## **The Future of Kurdistan**

"Thinking like a Nation" - conference theme - KNC 21st Conference

Considerations of the future of an issue, or state of being, is usually an attempt at predicting or projecting the status of that issue in the future based on its status at present or other historical time frames. This process can be a cursory mental overview or a detailed analysis and study of what exists now and the evaluator's vision of what changes, or lack thereof, lies ahead. This is my cursory mental overview.

When Kurds talk about the future of Kurdistan, most people think of it in terms of a sovereign nation: future statehood, the establishment of a Nation State (or Nation States), and a united Free Kurdistan, etc. in short, political sovereignty (Sovranty)

While this view of political sovereignty is an all important first step, and a critical benchmark to attain if Kurdistan is to assume its rightful place among nations, I like to submit here that political sovereignty Alone is not enough. Webster defines sovereignty as: "Freedom from external control or controlling influences", and what Kurds should aim for is full freedom from outside influences.

Political sovereignty gives the basic framework or the beginning steps for freeing the Kurdish people from outside political or military control. However, to attain, and later establish and consolidate Full sovereignty, a nation needs to take other essential and complimentary steps that secure and safeguard its political sovereignty. Thus, for the Kurdish nation to attain its full sovereignty, it needs to plan for, and work at attaining basic Socio-economic rights alongside its efforts for political sovereignty. Without a solid foundation in socio-economic rights, that is without the foundation for socio-economic sovereignty, political sovereignty will remain so much ink on paper.

Sovereign nations normally provide, or seek to provide, and guarantee all basic human rights to its subjects in addition to political rights. Regardless of what typology or classification of basic human rights one uses, these usually include what the UN Declaration of Human Rights call the right for freedom from "Want". This would include, among others, the social security rights like: the right to adequate nutrition, the right to health care, the right to education, the right to work and advance based on competency and merit, the right for adequate housing, clothing, cultural life, etc.

Sovereignty is not just having a flag, a seat in the UN, civil liberties, freedom of press, speech, thought, etc. it is much more: it is freedom from external influences and control.

If a nation is not independent economically and does not have the infrastructure and institutions that can provide for its subjects economically and socially, it will more not have the stamina to withstand external influences and pressures and will likely be dominated by political organizations and entities that will compromise the future of the nation to internal or external special interests leading in most cases to a failed state the like of which are rather common among third world countries around the globe.

Thus, if Kurds are to think like a nation, they will have to think of, and plan for socio-economic sovereignty

alongside of political sovereignty.

Having laid this principle as the yardstick for my considerations, it is time to use it to measure the progress we have achieved so far.

Of the different parts of occupied Kurdistan, southern Kurdistan (or Iraqi Kurdistan) is the more politically mature of all the parts and the place where such a yardstick may be used to see how it measures up. Southern Kurdistan has enjoyed self rule and a quasi independent status for almost eighteen years and therefore it is apt to see what kind of progress has been made.

During that period, the beginnings of political sovereignty and some of its basic tenets have been achieved.

Responsible thinkers and analysts might differ about the extent or degree of achievements in the fields of civil liberties, freedom of thought and speech, freedom of the press, rule of law, etc., but the disagreements are generally one of a quantitative nature rather than qualitative. However, when it comes to the establishment and/or guarantees of socio-economic rights or social security rights, I believe few people disagree that our achievements are nil or close to that.

Here are some brief reminders – I have picked only 3 major areas:

#### Economy:

Despite all the billions that have been poured into southern Kurdistan over the past few years, and all the monetary wealth and riches that it has created for a few, there seems to be little economic planning for Kurdistan as a nation. Most economic activities during this period have been concentrated in simple commerce. Trading of imported goods, often luxury items, and real estate has been the mainstay of the so-called economic boom. To my knowledge, there is little long term economic planning for a rainy day. No industries, not even simple textile or paper conversion ventures, no agro-industrial complexes, no large scale farming, animal husbandry, or dairy operations. The little primitive agriculture we had has all been abandoned or run into bankruptcy because of cheaper imported goods. We import almost everything from wheat for bread, to meat products to dairy products to vegetables, etc. you name it. Southern Kurdistan is living almost entirely on imported goods from food to clothing. A distorted form of free market economics is the king of the arena and everything that brings in a quick profit is a go without any regulations or protection for the consumer.

Thus, there are no long term plans for economic sovereignty and Kurdistan is not thinking like a nation.

#### Health-Care:

On another front, the standard and quality of free or affordable health-care offered to the public is getting worse by the day. Old, dilapidated hospitals are run-down, overcrowded, understaffed, under-equipped, and crumbling. Public health surveillance, services, and projects, the cardinal elements of health-care, are almost non-existent. All one needs to do is look at the quality of tap water provided by the city (full of visible crud and dirt), that is if you are lucky enough to other day to get a few gallons of water every other day, or go the back of a restaurant, even the expensive ones, to see the lack of surveillance.

Again, we are not providing, planning, or thinking like a nation.

Education:

Another important aspect of nation building is education. The standard and quality of education, at all stages, seems to be in a state of free fall. Many primary, middle and secondary schools have reduced their teachings to 3-4 a day because of multiple shifts in the same building. Post-secondary and university education and training is faring even worse. Even the middle-of-the-road standards we had before, and about which no one was happy, has given way to no standards. Anyone you talk to around universities, from students to staff to administration officials is dissatisfied. Private universities are popping up like mushroom everywhere (sometimes in one rented small building), without any planning, regulations, or accreditation processes, making the overall situation even more dismal.

Again, there seems to be no long term plans for quality education and cultural and technological development of the nation which translates into not planning for socioeconomic sovereignty, nor thinking like a nation.

None of these bode well for attaining complete and secure sovereignty for the nation and reflects even less favourably on thinking like a nation.